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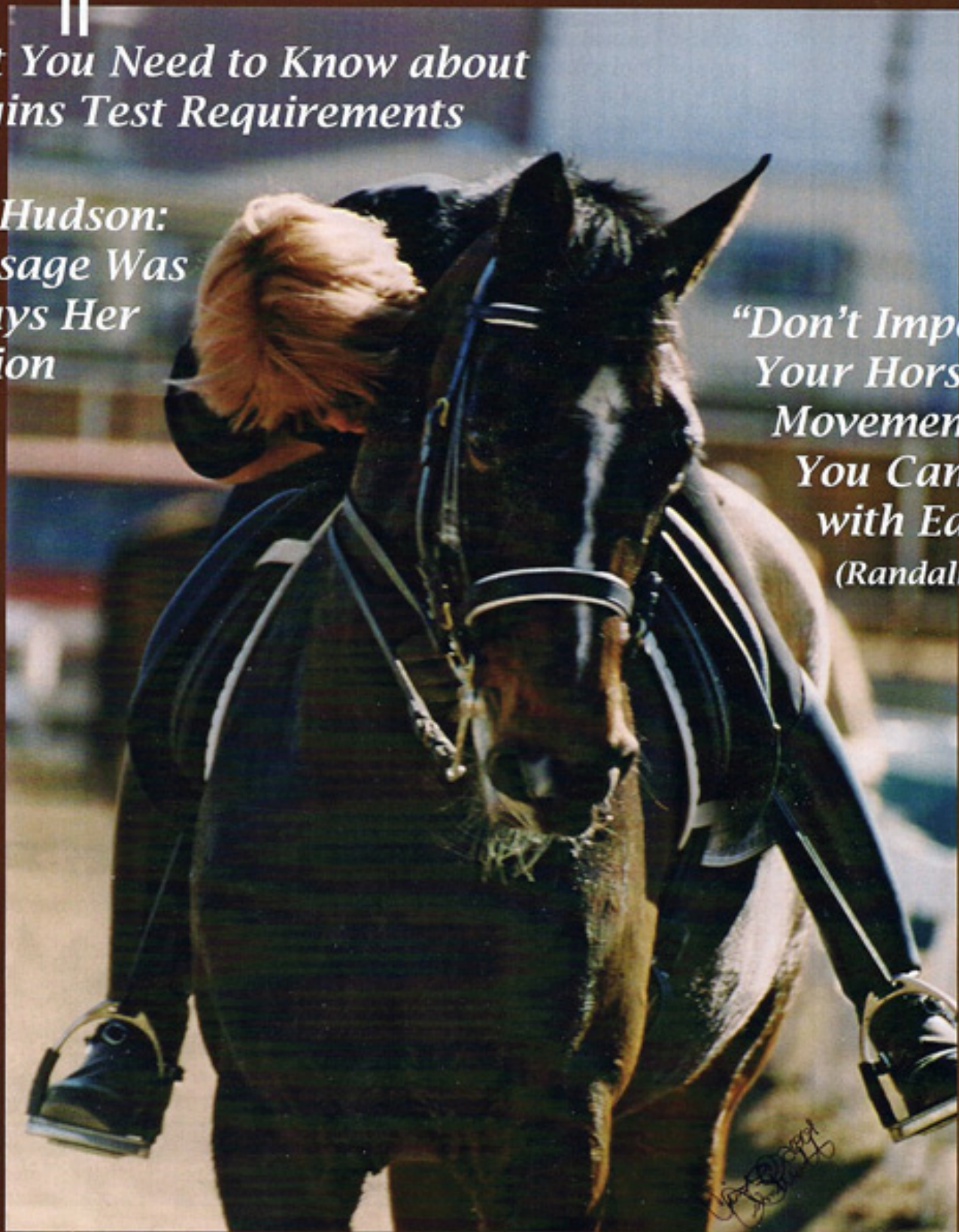
HORSEMEN'S VOICE

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Your Horse's
Movements, and
You Can Soar
with Eagles"
(Randall Davis)*



Point of View

Unwanted Horses: Developing Solutions We Can All Support

— by Elisabeth Jennings & Laura Bonar —

This "Point of View" is written in response to an opinion piece titled For the Welfare of Horses — Randall Davis Weighs in on Horse Slaughter, published in the May '09 issue of The Horsemen's Voice. If you would like a copy of that article by Randall Davis, call (505) 873-0150 or e-mail Catherine@HorseMensVoice.com.

Horses have played an important role in settling the Southwest. These iconic figures continue to be powerful symbols and important elements of the agrarian culture of New Mexico. But horses require substantial financial resources for optimum care. Some people own horses without fully understanding the long-term financial commitment. Given today's challenging economic times, those with a marginal ability to care for their horses, and even those who have always been able to provide proper care, are struggling.

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New Mexicans want change after seeing the likes of Grace, a mare abandoned to starve in the desert, or Miracle, shot five times but still alive after a botched euthanasia attempt. These horses, like many hundreds more, are victims of a perfect storm of events creating a sudden increase in unwanted equines: a troubled economy, increase in feed prices, and the closure of America's horse slaughter plants. The shuttering of the last horse slaughterhouses in Illinois and Texas was led by local citizens with the grave and well-founded concern that American horse slaughter was not humane. Dollar-driven slaughterhouse conditions meant tens of thousands of horses spent their last moments of life in sheer panic, fear, and pain.

However, no large-scale, institutionalized system of humanely disposing of equines has yet been created to replace equine slaughter anywhere

in the country. Such a system is desperately needed. This has led to an overabundance of horses, and some equine owners find themselves with few options for humane disposition.

Horse slaughter continues in Canada and Mexico. Last year, New Mexico's Santa Teresa export facility served as a gruesome funnel for nearly 16,000 horses going to slaughter. Both the appalling transport that horses endure on the way to Mexican slaughterhouses and the conditions of the slaughterhouses themselves, where horses are literally stabbed to death, are unbearable to witness.

Some argue that unless horses are slaughtered, they have no value, and they say this creates the current problem. But if that were a sound argument, it would extend to dogs as well, and Americans would be breeding and slaughtering them for shipment to Canada, Europe, and other countries where some people eat dogs. Clearly, value is a matter of perspective.

Armed with these facts, Animal Protection Voters (APV) was ready to seek solutions during New Mexico's 2009 legislative session. APV worked with a broad spectrum of concerned New Mexicans to improve conditions for horses in our state. The legislative initiative called the Equine Protection Fund would have provided a system of support for equine shelters and emergency assistance for equine owners, including subsidized euthanasia and disposal. Slaughter does not have to be the only option. The Equine Protection Fund was tabled in the House Agriculture Committee.

Absent a legislative remedy, Animal Protection of New Mexico is now creating a community-supported Equine Protection Fund. Through such a fund, New Mexico's horse shelters could receive the support they deserve for the diligent care provided to our state's abandoned, abused,

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and neglected equines. Still, the shelters cannot care for, rehabilitate, and adopt out every unwanted equine.

Owners need better access to the final gift of compassion: humane euthanasia.

Equine euthanasia costs are often prohibitive and, in some areas, access to a veterinarian and proper disposal of equines may be challenging. Thoughtful solutions to overcome these barriers will spare thousands of horses a terrifying end.

Our horses are worth more than what they would bring at the slaughter auction. An Equine Protection Fund will reduce the suffering of New Mexico's horses through outreach and education, sanctuary funding, and subsidized equine care and disposition. We must not resort to the easy answers of the past but instead look ahead to new approaches that reflect the humane values embraced by New Mexicans. Finding workable solutions for the humane care and disposition of equines is fundamental to those values.

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